

WITH MARY OF MAGDALA IN THE GARDEN, A GUIDED MEDITATION

by Suzanne Gagné Bregman



You are new to our company and you wish to know how I come to be here, a teacher among the believers? I will tell you. It's no secret. It happened because Jesus called my name and I followed.

My given name is "Mary," "Miriam" in Aramaic. My family's home is Magdala.

In my youth, I had my dreams:

I wanted to be special, to marry, have children, do all the things that women do.

But in my heart of hearts I longed for more though I knew not what.



What set me apart in those early days was a sickness that came upon me from time to time without warning – darkness, visions, voices, a body not mine to control.

They said I was cursed, possessed by demons, ironically, by seven, the perfect number.

It was rather a measure of how bad it was.

When I passed by, people made a sign against the evil eye.

To my family I brought shame. From them I had wealth that meant nothing, gave nothing except a solitary independence and the means to hide.

For me it was a kind of living death.



From a servant in my own house, I learned that Jesus of Nazareth, a noted prophet and healer, was travelling to Magdala.

When the day came, a large crowd assembled on the outskirts of town.

In desperation, I joined them, but stood trembling on the margins, shrouded by veil and cloak.



This Jesus spoke with power.

Hearing his voice, the rest of the world fell away as if blurred by mist, and in my mind's eye, from the mist arose a bridge to span the distance between us.

Was this my sickness? A vision? But no, this was light, not darkness.

He crossed to meet me, but blessedly drew no one's eye to our encounter.



As he neared, I scanned his face.
He looked into my eyes and . . . he saw me, truly saw me.
I heard my name though not aloud.



His calloused hand reached out and drew me from the shadows.
The world righted, shifted into focus.



And I was like one newborn with body, mind, spirit aligned and in my own possession.
I would willingly have followed him to death.



So I came to follow Jesus on the way along with others drawn by his vision of God's kin-dom. Here love reigned, not law; the lost and the least were as valued as the greatest. He taught deep truths with stories made of the stuff of daily life. He was endlessly patient with anyone who listened with an open heart. But the powerful, the prideful, the privileged who preyed on others? That was quite another thing altogether. And they hated him for it.



With Jesus I was, for the first time, an insider, not an outsider, not that he took account of such things. To him we were all inside.

Jesus was fond of nicknames, so Simon became "Peter" meaning "rock," and Zebedee's sons, were named "Sons of Thunder." Mine was so common a name that I became "Magdalene," its root from *migdal*, meaning "tower," and *gadel*, meaning "to grow strong as by the interweaving of strands." Because of him, I would grow into that name.



Jesus taught me to listen deeply, as he did, to an inner voice calling me to live God's dream for me.
I learned to trust that voice and go where it led, one step at a time.
Nothing else mattered.
That is how he lived.
As I followed, I came to understand him better and better who was my teacher in all things.
A deep and abiding friendship grew between us.
I staked my life on him. So did we all.



Then our world shattered.
The self-interest of temple and imperial Rome for once coincided and one of our own turned betrayer.
Events veered rapidly, violently, out of control.
Before the onslaught we were powerless . . . all but Jesus.
This was the future he had predicted, even feared,
but he claimed it as his work to do and walked toward it with purpose.
When they were done with him, he hung before us crucified,
as if planted in the earth, naked and ravaged.

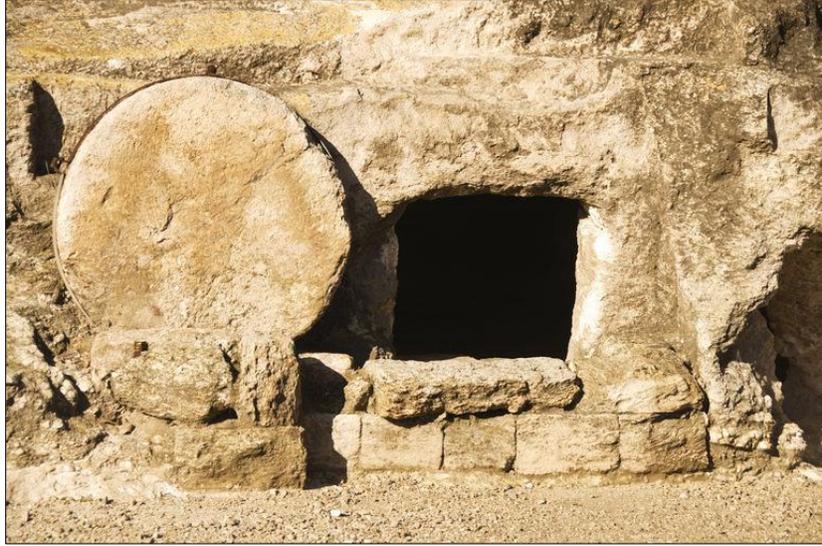
How I ached to heal him as he had once healed me, but I was helpless.
Dry-eyed, I stood like stone beside his weeping mother and a few others.
For three eternal hours I bore witness as he forgave, gave comfort, and with his last breath
surrendered himself to God.
He died as he had lived.
My soul fractured. How could it be that I was still living?



When it ended, I remained to see his body entombed by a man without the courage of his discipleship while Jesus lived. Yet he seemed brave enough now.
I too had once lived in hiding. I could find my way to accept and forgive one such as this.
I remained there in vigil as if by staying I might find my way to him in the depths of the netherworld.



I came again at dawn on Sunday to do the one small loving act that is left to women, one last anointing.
The immediate shock had passed,
But what remained was a vast emptiness . . . and tears tempestuous as the Sea of Galilee.
I could not stop weeping.



There is the grave. The stone, moved? What? What has happened here?

I must tell the brothers.

I flew like the wind to get Peter and John, then followed behind.

Blinded by tears, I had no idea what they did; yes, they entered the tomb, then withdrew and departed without a word.



Then, as if beckoned, I too went in. I saw the grave clothes and two strangers.

How odd, I thought distractedly. They ask why I am weeping. Foolish question.

I turned away, only to be asked again by a gardener. "Why are you weeping?"

"Tell me where you have put him," I implored, "I will take him away."

As if I could! But I was mad with grief.



And then I heard, softly, as if for the first time – “Mary.”
I knew him as he knew me, at once and forever: “Rabbouni!”
Oh joyous thought: “My life is returned to me. It will be as before.”
I reached, ready to embrace – only to hear, “Do not touch me.”

How can resurrection be at once so joyful and so painful?
Oh, I want what we had!
Then it dawns: You, my Lord, are the same . . . yet different.
I must relearn you in a way I have yet to discover.
You are here and beyond, without limit, risen. What does that mean?
For now, my joy will be different from yours, not yet full.
I must be patient.
I must find the courage to remember and rejoice in our past, but not cling to it,
lest by holding on, I fail to receive the presence you offer now.



You send me, my Lord, into an unknown future with the loving assurance that you are with me still.
You send me from tomb and garden with good news
 into the company of my sisters and brothers,
 into the world you still love.

You send me to live fully . . . and to speak of you, as *I* know you.
To you I am special, beloved.

You send me to do work that has *my* name on it; work that no one else can do.

The task may be difficult, the way unclear, but I know it will become clear if I but listen for my name.

One step at a time, looking for the blessing right in front in me that will light the path.

Right here, right now, amid chaos and loss, I choose the one thing that will bring me to my truest self
and bring your reign of love one step closer.

For at night there are tears, but joy will come in the morning.

July 22, 2020

Images from the 2018 movie, *Mary Magdalene*